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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE HONOURABLE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The Secretary General
United Nations
New York.

Dear Secretary General,

I am the mother of Kamal Bamadhaj, who was shot by the Indonesian military in East Timor on November 12, when they fired into an unarmed memorial procession. Kamal then bled to death while an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) vehicle, driven by an ICRC officer, attempting to get Kamal to hospital, was held up by the Indonesian authorities for a critical 30 minutes. As you know, Kamal was only one of at least 100 people shot that morning and many of these victims were also denied vital medical treatment.

The massacre in Dili cannot be passed off as a regretable overreaction. It is the latest albeit most horrifying instance of a systematic pattern of terror and repression by which the occupying Indonesian military keep control in East Timor. This has been amply documented to the UN Committee on Decolonization in successive Amnesty International reports.

The latest Amnesty International Report details "a pattern of short term detention, ill-treatment and torture of alleged political opponents of Indonesian rule in East Timor which has gained additional momentum since August (1990)" This was in addition to "a continuing pattern of serious violations...extrajudicial executions, the systematic use of torture against political detainees [and] hundreds of unresolved cases of "disappearances".

After the Indonesian invasion of newly independent East Timor in 1975, the United Nations repeatedly called on the Indonesian forces to withdraw, (General Assembly Resolution 3485 and Security Council resolution 384), so that the people of East Timor could "exercise freely their right to self determination." In 1982, the General Assembly passed responsibility for East Timor to the Secretary General to "initiate consultations with all parties concerned" to bring about a settlement.

Two disasterous results have emerged from these efforts. Each year as Secretary General you have reported to the General Assembly that consultations "are continuing", which has effectively taken the East Timor question off the UN agenda and silenced the General Assembly. Secondly, after nine years, these consultations (from which the East Timorese were excluded) resulted in an agreement between the governments of Indonesia and Portugal, the former colonial power, to send a Portuguese parliamentary mission

accompanied by UN officials to East Timor this November. As you know, this mission was postponed at the last minute when Indonesia objected to one of the journalists included by the Portuguese delegation.

The nine year "consultation" allowed the Indonesians to close off East Timor and terrorise its population while the world community remained largely ignorant of what was happening. Now the indefinite postponement of the mission has exposed the Timorese to further violent retaliation from the military. It is difficult not to draw the conclusion that you as Secretary General have been manipulated during the Cold War by Indonesia and certain Western powers to make a fait accompli of an illegal annexation.

Despite the UN brokered agreement between Indonesia and Portugal containing provisions to protect East Timorese who wished to meet the mission, the Indonesian military command in East Timor prepared for the Portuguese mission with a campaign of intimidation and arrests against Timorese who might voice pro-independence views. Nevertheless large numbers of people put their names on lists to speak to the mission while others, particularly students, prepared pro-independence banners and posters. The indefinite postponment of the mission has exposed all these people to retaliation by the military. Their desperation, by all accounts, turned the memorial procession into a, still peaceful and orderly, but defiantly pro-independence rally, aimed at attracting the attention of the world through the coincidental presence in Dili of the UN Rapporteur on torture, Mr Kooijmans.

The savage response of the Indonesian military has shocked the world. Eye witnesses describe deliberate, extended firing into a packed but peaceful crowd and "dozens" of bodies. Film taken at the scene shows unarmed youths, many with gunshot wounds, fleeing into the Santa Cruz cemetery amidst sounds of firing. This is followed by squads of soldiers calmly directed into the cemetery by an officer, where they are filmed beating with their rifle butts those who had taken refuge there, including the wounded. We know the ICRC was denied access to the wounded in hospital, as were the victim's families. And while senior ministers in Jakarta promised a "full enquiry", there have been unconfirmed but persistent reports from East Timor of eyewitnesses to the shootings being rounded up and executed by the military. Something must be done quickly to stop the killings and terror.

The Cold War has ended. Long-repressed national groups all over the world are getting an opportunity to speak for themselves. The UN is finally able to play an effective role in international politics. The time has come for it to resume its responsibility to the people of East Timor and finally redress the 16 year long denial of their most basic human rights. Please use your last month in office toward this end.

The Indonesian government has perpetrated a myth, willingly accepted by those Western states who desire good relations with her, that East Timor has been successfully integrated into Indonesia and is now peaceful, open and developing. The persistently demonstrated opposition to integration by East Timorese youth, most of whom were only babies at the time of the Indonesian invasion, and the deliberate, brutal response of the Indonesian military gives the lie to this myth.

An impartial inquiry into the November 12 killings cannot be conducted by the Indonesian authorities. The only way to stop the continuing killings is for the United Nations to accept genuinely its responsibility for East Timor and to establish an immediate presence there. An international enquiry into the massacre and other human rights violations in East Timor should be convened as soon as possible. Finally the ground should be prepared for the East Timorese to exercise freely their right to self-determination.

Yours truly,

Helen Todd

426-A Lengkok Bawah
Bukit Gelugor
Penang 11700
Malaysia